

While hunger soars in US, Biden feasts at billionaire's estate

Patrick Martin

23 November 2023

President Joe Biden is spending his Thanksgiving holiday at the \$34 million Nantucket estate of David Rubenstein, the billionaire co-founder of the Carlyle Group, a hedge fund notorious for buying up companies, slashing their workforces, stripping their assets, and selling off what remains at a profit.

Carlyle is not only a vicious corporate predator, it has long had the most intimate ties with the military-intelligence apparatus, particularly in connection with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The private equity firm has employed numerous war criminals from both capitalist parties, including former defense secretary Frank Carlucci, once its chairman, and former CIA director and Pentagon chief Leon Panetta, a highly paid “consultant.” Both George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush were directors of the company or a subsidiary.

The American media reported Biden’s arrival at the island off Massachusetts, a favored resort of Wall Street and the super-rich, without noting the stark social contrast between the president of the United States enjoying the opulent surroundings of the Nantucket estate and the conditions facing hundreds of millions of working people.

Biden will celebrate the traditional US holiday, as well as his 81st birthday, which fell on Monday this week, with cake and a plentiful Thanksgiving menu. Besides the estate itself, which Rubenstein made available for the presidential sojourn, there are the usual trappings of a presidential visit. As the local newspaper described it:

The presidential security entourage has been building on the island over the past five days—with multiple C-17 Globemasters and other aircraft delivering vehicles, equipment and supplies to Nantucket Memorial Airport. A large contingent of Massachusetts State Police Troopers arrived on the island by ferry on Monday. Island hotels are once again filled with those Secret Service agents, government personnel, State Troopers, and off-island media.

No such benefits are available to the millions of American working people facing hunger, poverty and homelessness on

the holiday that celebrates the resources generated by the fall harvest in the wealthiest country in the world.

While US agribusiness exports more than \$150 billion in food annually, hunger at home is soaring, according to the Food Research and Action Council (FRAC), citing a report by the US Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service released last month. Among the USDA’s findings:

- One in eight US households faced food insecurity in 2022, or 44.2 million people, a staggering increase of 10.3 million compared to a year earlier.
- The number of children living in these households jumped 44.6 percent to 13.4 million.
- One third of single-parent households headed by women were food insecure.
- Demographic groups experiencing higher than average rates of food insecurity included African-Americans, Latinos, Southerners and those living in rural areas (where most food is produced!).

The primary cause of food insecurity and hunger is poverty, exacerbated by cuts in federal social programs carried out by the Biden administration and endorsed by Congress. Biden’s termination of the COVID state of emergency last May will increase the mass suffering, automatically cutting funds for food stamps (SNAP); supplemental nutrition for pregnant and nursing women, young children and infants (WIC); and expanded school lunch and after-school snack programs.

The working class as a whole faces higher prices for virtually every kind of food, with food prices rising 11 percent over the past two years, as well as shortages of many foods. For lower income workers, this is made even worse by the absence of full-scale supermarkets in many urban areas (“food deserts”), which makes it difficult to obtain fresh fruits and vegetables at all.

The conditions of deprivation in impoverished cities like Detroit, once the high-wage center of auto production, were demonstrated this week as thousands turned out to receive free turkeys and other food items for a typical Thanksgiving meal in the city and its suburbs, including 3,000 alone in River Rouge, an inner suburb, and 600 in Ann Arbor.

President Biden touts his humble origins, describing himself as “middle-class Joe” and the most labor-friendly president in history. Meanwhile, his supposed worker “friends” are facing

cuts in their real wages because of inflation, a corporate assault on benefits like healthcare, and the destruction of jobs.

For autoworkers, UPS workers, rail workers and many others, this attack on their living standards has been carried out through contracts imposed by the unions with the support of the present occupant of the White House. When workers have sought to challenge these attacks, like the rail workers a year ago, they have seen their right to strike stripped away by congressional action demanded and endorsed by Biden.

As the WSWWS has explained, Biden is the friend of the unions, not the workers. He regards the unions and their highly paid bureaucratic apparatuses as the best mechanism for slashing working class living standards and suppressing the class struggle.

He counts on the unions to straitjacket the working class politically, particularly on the questions of foreign policy and war. The main focus of Democratic Party policy is the aggressive promotion of American imperialist interests overseas through an explosion of militarism against Russia, in the Middle East against Iran, and in the Indo-Pacific against China, which is increasingly taking on the form of a third world war.

These war policies are widely opposed in the working class, a hostility shown in the mass protests against Israeli genocide in Gaza. But they have near-unanimous support in the capitalist ruling elite for whom Biden speaks.

Biden's relationship with the wealthy was summed up in his remarks to a Manhattan fundraiser in 2019, when he reassured his Wall Street audience that his mildly reformist pretenses were politically necessary but shouldn't trouble them. He said that despite his rhetoric about making the rich "pay their fair share," under a Biden administration, "nobody has to be punished. No one's standard of living will change, nothing would fundamentally change."

Carlyle Group Co-Chair Rubenstein, who is making his estate available to Biden, heads a company that has \$382 billion in assets under management, a sum nearly three times greater than all federal food programs combined.

Rubenstein worked as counsel to a subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee in 1975-76 while Biden was on that panel. He later worked as a White House aide in the Carter administration before returning to private practice. In 1987, he was one of three co-founders of the Carlyle Group and became immensely wealthy.

He has accumulated influence in Washington society as well as wealth. Rubenstein is currently chairman of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the National Gallery of Art, the Council on Foreign Relations, and The Economic Club of Washington D.C. He is the former chairman of the Duke University Board of Trustees and the Smithsonian Institution. In 2022, he became chair of the University of Chicago's Board of Trustees.

This pillar of the ruling class is described in the corporate

media as a "personal friend" of Biden. The same label is applied to billionaire Harlan Crow's relationship to far-right Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, the recipient of lucrative vacations, private flights and other perks, as well as investments in the consulting firm of "Ginni" Thomas, the justice's wife and activist in Trump's 2020 "Stop the Steal" effort to overturn the election.

Biden and Thomas are corrupt political instruments of rival factions of the capitalist ruling elite. They may quarrel bitterly over policy, but on the fundamental class questions they are in unison: They defend capitalism and the domination of the wealthy at home, and the assertion of US imperialist interests abroad.

Those who claim that it is possible to "pressure" the Biden administration to enact reformist policies, oppose the threat to democratic rights posed by Donald Trump, or restrain the genocidal violence of Israel, the military spearhead of American imperialism in the Middle East, are spreading fatal political delusions.

The Democratic Party is not the alternative to the increasingly fascistic Republicans. It is an alternate route to the same destination. The driving force of both Democratic Party militarism and Republican Party authoritarianism is the deepening crisis of world capitalism, at the center of which is American capitalism.

The way forward for working people is a resolute break with both capitalist parties and the building of an independent political movement of the working class based on a socialist and antiwar program. This should include a sweeping program to abolish hunger, poverty and homelessness by expropriating the wealthy parasites personified by Carlyle, placing the economy under democratic working class control and ending social inequality. This is the revolutionary perspective for which the Socialist Equality Party is fighting.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact